

## Continuous Process Improvement Needs Full-Time Attention

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To sustain a focus on continuous process improvement, more mature process-managed enterprises will need to define a process operations manager role as a full-time job. Clients striving for higher levels of process maturity should familiarize themselves with the skill set outlined in this research, which are required to sustain the cultural and organizational transformation of higher process maturity.

### Key Findings

- As the focus on process improvement shifts from initial iterations to continuous optimization, this higher rate of change requires full-time attention. Although the process owner makes process optimization decisions, he or she needs a partner to coordinate the implementation of those decisions with process stakeholders and nonprocess participants. Gartner identifies this partner role as the process operations manager.
- Usually, organizations will have internal candidates for the process operations manager, because internal organizational and process knowledge are paramount.
- The process operations manager role represents a potential career path for business process analysts.

### Recommendations

- For enterprises with process improvement initiatives beyond stage 3stage 3 in Gartner's Process Maturity Model, consider assigning a process operations manager to support process owners and work with process stakeholders and nonparticipants.
- To sustain a culture of continuous improvement, the process operations manager role should be staffed as a full-time job.
- Using the lists contained in this research, evaluate the skills that will be needed in your organization for the successful performance of the process operations manager's role.
- When considering the skills needed for the process operations manager role, examine related predecessor roles, such as customer service manager, sales operations manager or business operations, and consider persons holding those roles as potential candidates in addition to senior business process analysts.

## **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

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As organizations focus on interprocess automation and control (stage 3 of Gartner's BPM Maturity Model — see "BPM Maturity Model Identifies Six Phases for Successful BPM Adoption") and strive for innovation through an agile business structure, Gartner forecasts that the role of the process operations manager will become increasingly important. During the first few iterations of process improvement, the process owner or business process analyst working with the owner will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the changes. However, as the focus on process improvement shifts from initial iterations to continuous optimization, this higher rate of change requires full-time attention. At this point, the role of process operations manager should be formalized into a full-time job.

The business process operations manager is an emerging job. This individual assists the process owner with the day-to-day challenges of managing an agile process. Among the process operations manager's duties will be immediately spotting anything that is causing subpar performance, especially performance bottlenecks, or identifying unique and highly efficient approaches to work. The process operations manager brings these issues to the process owner's attention for resolution and then coordinates getting the process adjustments in place quickly and with minimal disruption. The process operations manager will usually report to the process owner, but will also work closely with the many different stakeholders participating in the process and those who perform supporting activities across the organization (such as HR and IT) and outside the particular process context. Although the process operations manager job may be a line management role (rather than staff, with some process participants reporting to him or her), his or her influencing skills and activities are critical to achieving desired outcomes. The cultural transformation typical of higher process maturity levels directly contributes to the ability of the process owner to influence stakeholders who report to other functional silos and achieve the horizontal process outcomes desired.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING ASSUMPTION(S)**

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Though 2015, the process operations manager role will be explicitly defined and staffed in fewer than 20% of Global 2000 companies (0.8 probability).

## **ANALYSIS**

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Shifting to a culture of continuous process improvement and optimization requires coordination and oversight of many operational details for critical enterprisewide processes. Although the process owner role is responsible for making the difficult decisions about when and how to optimize activities, he or she also typically has a full-time job as a stakeholder in the process itself (see "Toolkit Sample Template: Role Description for the Process Owner"). The process owner is primarily concerned about meeting the performance targets for the process during the long term, (as well as his or her own functional performance metrics), and may not be able to spend much time tracking daily performance and identifying the smaller incremental changes that could be beneficial. As the pace of change accelerates, these oversight responsibilities also increase. In particular, as the scope of the process definition broadens, crossing multiple functions, and the frequency of changes that affect large numbers of process participants increases, we have identified the need for a process operations manager job.

Reporting to the process owner, the process operations manager works closely with the many different stakeholders and supporting functions across the organization. For example, when process improvements take place, the process operations manager is responsible to ensure

finance is capturing and accounting for the correct activities, tasks and people that have changed. Furthermore, the process operations manager is accountable for ensuring that HR has the correct roles, responsibilities and incentives in place. Influencing and coordinating all these changes can become overwhelming to a process owner, who is also functioning as a line manager. Thus, the process operations manager must ensure seamless process execution. When continuous-improvement-related activities become frequent enough and demanding enough, a manager is needed to oversee the execution of these activities. This is the process operations work and is distinct from business operations work; in other words, this is the process of process (see Note 1).

The roles required for process optimization are analogous to those of a car racing crew. There is the car owner, a driver (or multiple drivers), the crew chief and the pit crew. A driver executes the primary task of driving the car. The crew chief sees to it that there are no obstacles, and is always looking for some way to make the car go faster. The pit crew supports the drivers' efforts and supports the crew chief's goals. With process optimization, the process owner is the car owner. The process operations manager is the crew chief, the drivers are the process participants and the pit crew is the group of individuals working in other supporting functions to the process participants.

The process operations manager role is also a potential career path for business process analysts. As the process perspective becomes ingrained in the corporate culture and business managers apply process thinking as a normal course of their efforts, staffing levels in the process center of excellence may be able to be reduced. At this point in the organization's maturity with process management, a business process analyst could transition over to the business area as he or she becomes more engaged in a regular, daily way with the process owner. (At this point in organizational maturity, the Process Center of Excellence often reports to a C-level executive who is *not* the CIO and not responsible for a core, functional area of the business.)

Because so few organizations are yet in stage 3 of the Maturity Model, we forecast that, through 2012, the process operations manager role will be explicitly defined and staffed in fewer than 20% of Global 2000 companies (0.8 probability).

For those organizations that *do* desire full-time, dedicated process operations managers, the qualities described below provide the starting point for the hiring decision. Those enterprises that want to initially combine the process operations manager role with another set of responsibilities, such as those of the process owner, can consider these qualities when defining role-specific responsibilities and setting candidate expectations.

## Role Synopsis

The business process operations manager deals with the day-to-day aspects of ensuring that all process participants and stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities toward the goal of delivering seamless execution of the end-to-end process. Duties include identifying and removing any obstacles that may impede superior process performance by examining all courses of action and achieving an optimal solution, including those parts of the organization not directly under the process owner's direction. Thus, a key personal characteristic of a process operations manager is his or her ability to be an influencer. The process operations manager drives productivity gains by continually improving the process, by providing greater visibility to stakeholders concerning the way work is accomplished, and by developing innovative ways to deliver value to customers and shareholders. Among the process operations manager's most important duties will be immediately spotting performance changes, whether or not they are performance bottlenecks, or identifying unique and highly efficient approaches to work. The process operations manager then puts desired process adjustments in place as quickly as possible and with minimal disruption. Other important responsibilities are:

- Ensuring that all process changes can be funded within the restraints of the annual operating budget or handed off to the process office for special consideration
- Communicating all process changes and authorization procedures effectively across all affected business functional areas
- Maintaining an active list of process change ideas, determining priorities based on cost and added value, and establishing an implementation schedule based on practicality
- Ensuring quick adoption of all process improvement initiatives by training process participants in their roles and responsibilities, and empowering them to make process decisions
- Amending support procedures to ensure rapid deployment of approved process changes
- Being aware of comparable process performance in the industry and striving to achieve best in class
- Driving best practices for aligning process tasks with activity-based costing requirements
- Keeping HR and the process owner abreast of potential role changes and incentive requirements
- Maintaining regularly scheduled meetings with the process owner, subprocess owners/stakeholders, and the process office to review impact of change requests
- Determining optimal resource balancing across the business process and providing recommendations to finance for business planning

The process operations manager will usually report to the process owner, but will also work closely with the many different stakeholders and those who perform supporting functions across the organization.

## Hiring Considerations

Most organizations will have internal candidates for the process operations manager, because knowledge of the internal organization and process knowledge is paramount. However, clients may want to consider external hires when significant cultural and personnel change is needed. Several related and well-populated predecessor roles may include the required skills, including:

- Customer service manager
- Sales operations manager
- Business operations manager
- Production operations manager
- Project operations manager
- Finance operations manager
- Process engineering manager
- Senior business process analyst
- Assistant general manager

- Assistant plant manager

Recruiters will vary in their understanding of the process operations manager's role. However, the term "operations manager" will help them better understand the skills being sought. Search companies will likely not be experts on this particular role because it falls below their typical radar.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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"Business Process Improvement Role Overview"

"Role Definition and Organizational Structure: Business Process Improvement"

"Toolkit Sample Template: Role Description for the Process Owner"

"BPM Maturity Model Identifies Six Phases for Successful BPM Adoption"

### Note 1

#### Cultural Transformation and Process Office

**Cultural Transformation:** Unless the entire process improvement approach is underpinned by a strong foundation of cultural transformation, there is significant risk that process improvement efforts will achieve local improvements, but not achieve sustained, enterprisewide success. However, if cultural transformation (from a silo organization structure — usually based on function or product — to process-oriented organization structure) lies at the heart of the process improvement effort, it puts an entirely different perspective on the role of the process owner and process operations manager, and the way that they go about achieving desired outcomes. A siloed culture prevents interdepartmental issues from being resolved between peers at lower operating levels.

**The Process Office:** In a process-centric organization, governance of process is consolidated into a process office. The process office is usually a committee of senior executives who collectively prioritize strategic process improvement opportunities, delegate process ownership and align functional budget allocations to value-creating processes. The process office is another reflection of the cultural change from "command and control" style leadership to team-based leadership.

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